

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON OPERATION OF HOPPER DREDGES
IN THE FREEPORT HARBOR CHANNEL PROJECT

On September 26, 1995, the contract hopper Dredge *Atchafalaya* began work on the Entrance Channel of the Freeport Harbor Channel Project. Contract specifications required dredging an estimated 1,959,000 cubic yards (CY) of shoal material. The required depth of dredging was 49 feet below Mean Low Tide (MLT, Corps of Engineers Datum), with 2 feet of allowable overdepth dredging along the Entrance Channel and 47 feet MLT with 2 feet of overdepth along the Jetty Channel.

Dredging began on September 26, 1995, and was completed on January 16, 1996. The *Atchafalaya* worked until November 19, during which a total of 973 loads of dredged material was collected and placed into Placement Area No. 1. This dredge was replaced by the *Ouachita* on November 21, and worked until completion of the project. This dredge collected 792 loads. Dredging was performed between Stations -180+00 and 0+00 in the Entrance Channel, and 0+00 to 40+00 in the Jetty Channel. A total of 2,674,026 CY of material was excavated from within the channel.

The dredge was equipped with rigid draghead turtle deflectors, and 100% inflow screening with a 4-inch square mesh. NMFS-approved turtle observers provided 24-hour/day monitoring of dragheads and screens for each load cycle. The observers were employed by Coastwise Consulting and were contracted by Gulf Coast Trailing Co., the dredging contractor.

During the performance of this dredging by the *Atchafalaya*, one turtle encounter was documented. A copy of the daily and weekly observer reports is enclosed. This encounter occurred on October 9, in load no. 254, and involved a loggerhead.

One of the recurring difficulties experienced by the observers involved the excessive amounts of clay that were often dredged. The clay was taken as cohesive masses which often clogged the screening and made cleanup physically difficult and time-consuming.